

What You Didn’t Know About Islam

First Edition, August 2005

Preface

What do you *really* know about Islam and Muslims?

What does Islam actually teach about Allah (Almighty God), Jesus, the purpose of life, the treatment of women, or the perpetration of terrorism? Who are Muslims, where do they come from, and what have they contributed to the world?

You may think you have a pretty good idea – after all, you can hardly switch on the TV or pick up a newspaper these days without the words “Islam” or “Muslim” being mentioned in some context. But how authentic is the information you are receiving? Does the talking head on the network news have his facts right about Islamic teachings? Does the angry man with the AK-47 represent Muslims? Are these reliable sources on which to base your understanding?

This concise booklet separates the wheat from the chaff. It is written by Muslim New Yorkers, in order to explain the basic foundations of Islamic belief and life. It is based on authoritative sources that Muslims all over the world have accepted for the last 1400 years.

If you are content to let others do your thinking for you, or you want to stick to preconceived ideas despite the facts, then perhaps this booklet is not for you – please feel free to pass it on to someone else. But if you want to know the truth about the fastest growing religion in America – the faith of one fifth of the world’s population, then read on.

All we ask is that you do so with an open mind.

Islam and Muslims

Islam is an Arabic word which means ‘submission to the Will of Allah (Almighty God)’. Islam comes from the same root as the word “Salam”, meaning peace. Therefore, the name of the religion itself carries a deep spiritual meaning – true peace can be achieved through knowing Allah (Almighty God), obeying His Commands, and ensuring that all acts of worship are directed towards no one but Him.

The central teaching of Islam is that Allah (Almighty God), the One, the Unique, Incomparable Creator of all that exists, alone is worthy of all worship. Hence, Islam is not a new religion, but a continuation of the clear and profound message of pure monotheism revealed by Allah (Almighty God) throughout history to all of His prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. With the revelation of the Qur’an, Allah’s final message to mankind, this primordial religion received a name: Islam. Allah (Almighty God) says: This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion Islam [Qur'an 5:3].

The laws that Allah (Almighty God) revealed to each prophet differed according to the needs of the community to which he was sent, but the religion was the same – submission to the Will of Allah (Almighty God): Islam. Allah (Almighty God) says: And verily We have raised in every nation a messenger, (proclaiming): Serve Allah and shun false gods [Qur'an 16:36].

Thus, the religion of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, was Islam. Muhammad was therefore the final, not the first, prophet of Islam. Through his prophethood, Allah’s divinely revealed religion was perfected and completed for all mankind.

This continuity is reflected in the 6 core articles of faith in Islam:

1. Belief in Allah (Almighty God)
2. Belief in the Angels
3. Belief in the Scriptures
4. Belief in the Prophets
5. Belief in the Life Hereafter
6. Belief in Divine Predestination

It is also reflected in the 5 pillars of Islam, which form the basic structure of an Islamic life:

1. Testimony of faith – to declare: “There is none worthy of worship except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”
2. Prayer
3. Fasting
4. Charity
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca – at the heart of which lies the first building established for the worship of Allah (Almighty God), built by Abraham and his son Ishmael

A Muslim is ‘one who submits to the Will of Allah (Almighty God)’. Anyone, in any period of history, who has submitted to the Will of Allah (Almighty God) is thus considered a Muslim. Hence, all of the prophets, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, were Muslims.

In the past, Muslims were often mistakenly referred to as “Muhammadans” by Europeans. This was due to the widespread propagation of a malicious distortion over several centuries claiming that Muslims worship Muhammad, just as Christians worship Jesus. Of course, this is antithetical to the most basic teaching of Islam - a Muslim is absolutely not permitted to worship anything besides Allah (Almighty God).

Today, there are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, which is 22% of the world’s population. Islam is predicted to become the religion with the most adherents worldwide by 2050. It is estimated that over 6 million Muslims live in America. A common misconception is that all Muslims are Arabs, another is that all Arabs are Muslims. In fact, only 18% of Muslims are Arabs. Whilst most Arabs are Muslims, they are not exclusively so. Millions of Arabs are Christians - the majority of Arabs in America are in fact from Christian backgrounds.

Muslims come from all races and ethnicities – Bosnians, Nigerians, Egyptians, Chinese, Indians and many others. The country with the highest Muslim population is Indonesia in south-east Asia, with over 210 million - more Muslims than in all the Arab countries combined. Islam is, and always has been, a universal faith intended for all mankind - the companions of Muhammad included Arabs, Persians, Africans and Byzantine Romans. Thousands of Americans of varying heritage - European, Asian, Latino, African and other – convert to Islam every year, adding to the rich tapestry of the Muslim world.

Allah

A major misconception held by many is that “Allah” is the God of Muslims, and is different to the God of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. This is patently and demonstrably false. There is only One God, and “Allah” is simply the Arabic word that means “God”. Arabic speaking Christians and Jews also refer to God as “Allah” - the Bible in Arabic uses “Allah” for God.

The foundation of the Islamic faith is belief in Allah - the Almighty God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. One of the unique aspects of Islam is that it is absolutely uncompromising on the Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah (Almighty God). He is the Sole Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, with no other being sharing in His Lordship. His attributes are free of all imperfection, and beyond any similarity to His Creation. Allah (Almighty God) says: There is nothing like Him and He hears and sees all things [Qur’an 42:11]. In Islam, God is God, and the creation is creation – they are not mixed together in some unintelligible fashion.

Given these attributes, Allah (Almighty God) alone - not any idol, human being, or anything else - is worthy of all worship. Allah (Almighty God) says: Know, therefore, that there is no god who deserves to be worshiped except Allah; and ask forgiveness for your sins [Qur’an 47:19]. Some other religions also believe in Allah (Almighty God), but they violate this belief by worshipping others alongside Him, which is, as all of the prophets taught, the worst possible sin.

The Islamic concept of Allah (Almighty God) is therefore straightforward and easy to understand - free of irrational, mysterious or confusing ideas. That there is only One God, not a Trinity or a multitude of deities, is an idea that any person - whether a layman, or a scholar, can understand without difficulty. The attributes of Allah

(Almighty God), so clearly expressed in the Qur'an, correspond perfectly to man's innate predisposition towards recognizing and worshipping Him alone.

Islam's pure monotheistic belief means that Muslims experience and maintain a close and direct relationship with Allah (Almighty God), free of any intermediaries. There are no middlemen between the Muslim and Allah (Almighty God). When a Muslim prays, he prays only to Him, and if he seeks forgiveness, he seeks it only from Him. Allah (Almighty God) says: Call on Me and I will answer you [Qur'an 40:60].

The Purpose of Life

What is the meaning of life? Why do we exist? These are questions that most people ask at some time in their lives. Allah (Almighty God) gives us a clear answer: And I created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me [Qur'an 51:56]. Allah (Almighty God) is our Creator, and our purpose in life is to know and worship Him. When we realize our purpose in life and act accordingly, we achieve our full potential as human beings. We gain peace in this life, and salvation in the hereafter.

Worship in Islam is a comprehensive term that includes everything that Allah (Almighty God) loves and is pleased with, whether it is a belief, a word, or a deed. The essence of worship is Allah-consciousness. Therefore, it encompasses not only the ritual acts of worship such as prayer and fasting, but also includes patience, sincerity and kindness. In fact, any act – even a mundane worldly action such as going to work or feeding one's family, can be considered an act of worship if one's intention is to please Allah (Almighty God) thereby.

Islam teaches that all human beings are born pure - in a state of original sinlessness, as opposed to a state of "Original Sin". By becoming a Muslim, all of one's past sins are forgiven, and one returns to the sinless state in which Allah (Almighty God) created him or her.

Subsequently, if we fall into sin during the course of our lives, we must never despair. The door of repentance is open for those who seek it. Allah (Almighty God) says: Your Lord knows best what is in your inner-selves. If you are righteous, then, verily, He is Ever Most Forgiving to those who turn unto Him again and again in obedience, and in repentance [Qur'an 17:25]. On the Day of Judgment, Allah (Almighty God) will Judge us according to his infinite Mercy and Justice, and assign us to everlasting paradise or hell.

The Qur'an

"Al Qur'an" is an Arabic term that means "The Recitation". The Qur'an is the literal Speech of Allah (Almighty God), His final message to mankind, revealed word by word to his prophet, Muhammad, through the archangel Gabriel.

The Qur'an is remarkable for a number of reasons. It is the most recited book on Earth, a book of unsurpassed wisdom and astounding comprehensiveness. The Qur'an is a book of guidance that addresses every aspect of life, from the ultimate questions of existence to the foundations of establishing a just social order. It contains detailed, historically accurate accounts of the lives and missions of earlier

prophets like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

In contrast to previously revealed scriptures, the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved since its revelation both orally and in writing since the time of it's revelation. Even today, there are hundreds of thousands of Muslims from around the world who can recite the entire text from memory – just as it was memorized in the time of Muhammad.

But above and beyond these remarkable qualities, the Qur'an is considered a living miracle of the Arabic language. It's exquisite linguistic eloquence and stylistic beauty posed a challenge at the time of it's revelation - a challenge that remains unanswered today.

The Qur'an explicitly challenges anyone to produce a chapter similar to one of it's chapters. Allah (Almighty God) says: And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed to Our slave, then produce a chapter like it [Qur'an 2:23]. The Arabs at the time of Muhammad were unsurpassed poets and knew how to use their language to maximum effect, yet none were able to match the depth, power and beauty of the Qur'an.

This is not a subjective evaluation. The Arabic language is divided into 16 forms - one for normal speech, one for poetry, and so on. The Qur'an fit into none of these pre-existing forms. In other words, it was a completely new pattern that defied linguistic classification, and at the same time moved men to tears, and sometimes to embrace Islam, merely upon hearing it's sublime words.

Muhammad, like most Arabs at that time, was illiterate. If the Qur'an was the work of Muhammad as some doubters have claimed - how was it possible for an illiterate man compose what is acknowledged as the most beautiful work – in both style and content - ever produced in the Arabic language?

The Qur'an also contains explicit, precise prophecies which have come to pass, and information about scientific and natural phenomena, such as the development of the human embryo, which have only recently come to be known in the light of modern instrumentation and techniques. The miraculous nature of the Qur'an is a clear indication of its divine origin.

Muhammad

We know more about Muhammad than any other prophet in history. His life was lived in the full light of history, and even the minutest details of his daily life were preserved and authenticated for later generations of Muslims, who would take him as the ultimate role model.

Muhammad was an Arab born in Mecca in 570CE. He was a direct descendant of Abraham through his first son, Ishmael. He was widely known for his honesty and good conduct, to the extent that he was nicknamed "Al-Amin" – which means "The Trustworthy", and called upon to arbitrate in the bitter disputes between the Arab tribes.

Muhammad kept away from the idolatry, adultery and other widespread evils of his

time, and chose to worship only Allah (Almighty God), following in the footsteps of Abraham, his forefather. In 610CE, Allah (Almighty God) elected him to be His final prophet and began the revelation of the Qur'an to him through the archangel Gabriel, a process that would take 23 years to complete. This momentous event in human history began a period of intense persecution and exile for Muhammad and the small band of Muslims.

In time, by the Will of Allah (Almighty God), the message of pure monotheism had spread and Muslims numbered in the thousands, united under the leadership of Muhammad.

The Muslims marched on Mecca, the inhabitants of which expected to be slaughtered or taken as slaves, as was the custom in Arabia at that time. Instead, Muhammad stunned the Meccans by announcing a general amnesty, forgiving those who had killed, robbed and otherwise cruelly persecuted Muslims. Allah (Almighty God) says: And We have not sent you except as a mercy to mankind [Qur'an 21:107]. The majority of the Meccans embraced Islam wholeheartedly, finally acknowledging Muhammad's sincerity and recognizing the truth of his message.

The centerpiece of Mecca was the Ka'aba – established by Abraham as the first building dedicated to the worship of Allah (Almighty God). The polytheistic pre-Islamic Arabs had filled it with idols who they worshipped besides Allah (Almighty God). Muhammad, his mission nearing its end, cleansed the Ka'aba of it's idols – restoring the building built by his forefather Abraham back to its original purpose – the worship of Allah (Almighty God) alone. Today, over a billion Muslims turn toward the direction of the Ka'aba when they pray.

Despite his conquest of Arabia, Muhammad's lifestyle remained humble. He often went hungry for lack of food, sewed his own clothes when they needed repair and milked his own goats.

His message and example would inspire millions, and within a few years of his death, Muslims, united under the enlightened leadership of Muhammad's companions, liberated Syria, Iraq, Persia, Egypt and Palestine. As in Arabia, most of the inhabitants of these lands chose to embrace Islam as their way of life.

His life was a shining example to all humanity of how one should live nobly – as a man, a husband, a father, a best friend, a leader, and a ruler.

Jesus

Learning that Muslims love Jesus and believe in his miracles comes as a surprise to many people, especially Christians. Islam teaches that Jesus is one of the greatest prophets of Allah (Almighty God), like Moses before him, and Muhammad after him. The story of Jesus and his blessed mother Mary feature prominently in the Qur'an. Jesus is mentioned more times than Muhammad in the Qur'an, and the 19th Chapter of the Qur'an is titled "Maryam", which is Arabic for "Mary".

Based on the Qur'an, Muslims believe in Jesus' virgin birth, his healing of the blind and the leper, his raising of the dead, and other miracles, all of which were bestowed upon him as a favor from his Lord. As pure monotheists, Muslims do not worship

Jesus, just as they do not worship Muhammad or any other human being. Allah (Almighty God) says about Mary: She said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?" He said: "Even so: Allah creates what He wills: When He has decreed a plan, He but says to it, 'Be,' and it is! [Qur'an 3:47].

Allah (Almighty God) says about his prophet Jesus: And will make him a Messenger to the Children of Israel (saying): "I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I design for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's Leave; and I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I bring the dead to life by Allah's Leave. And I inform you of what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely, therein is a sign for you, if you believe [Qur'an 3:49].

Also, Allah (Almighty God) tells us that He saved Jesus from being crucified and killed by his enemies. Allah (Almighty God) says: That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of Allah"; - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not: Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise [Qur'an 4:157-158].

The main difference between Islam and Christianity is regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. Islam teaches that there is One God, and that Jesus is His prophet, whereas Christianity teaches that Jesus is one of three components of a Trinity. However, according to Islam such a belief is polytheism – the worst sin – because it ascribes divinity to another being besides God.

A few minutes of clear thinking is enough to disprove that Jesus is God. How can Jesus be God, when he himself worshipped God? This shows a need and a weakness on the part of the one worshipping, since he is dependent on a higher authority, whereas God is perfect, free of all weaknesses and dependencies. Does God need to worship God? If so, how many Gods are there, and how can the one doing the worshipping truly be considered God?

Furthermore, Christianity teaches that Jesus, who is God, died to redeem the sins of mankind. The idea of the Eternal and Ever-Living God *dying* is self-contradictory. Think that over for a moment. If God died, who resurrected God? If God really died, there would be no one left to resurrect Him. If God was alive to resurrect God, then God didn't die. If God resurrected God, how many Gods are there, and how can the one being resurrected truly be considered God?

Clearly, if one is truly honest - this does not make any sense. The only way out of this conundrum is to admit that God is God, and Jesus is a man – a great, righteous prophet – but still a human being. One may take refuge in calling the obviously contradictory and illogical claim - that Jesus is God - a 'mystery'. But God wants to guide us and illuminate us with His Truth, not confuse us. The truth is that confusion like this comes not from God, but from man-made doctrines.

The doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, the Sacrificed Savior and Divine Sonship all have parallels in the pagan cultures - Roman,Greek and Persian - prevalent at the time of their formulation. The idea of God fathering offspring, or of god-men walking amongst us is due to the influence of these pagan cultures.

Jesus never claimed to be God, or asked people to worship him. As a faithful prophet, he was a monotheist who worshipped God, just like Moses before him, and Muhammad after him.

Tolerance

A hallmark of Islamic history and civilization has been the tolerance for other religions and cultures. It is absolutely forbidden for Muslims to force others to embrace Islam. Allah (Almighty God) says: There is no compulsion in religion; the right direction is henceforth distinct from error [Qur'an 2:256].

An important facet of Islamic law deals with the protection of the rights of minorities in an Islamic state. Jews and Christians are accorded an especially honorable title: "People of the Book".

When Umar, the great Muslim leader, companion of Muhammad and second Caliph entered Jerusalem as its liberator, he guaranteed freedom of worship for it's inhabitants. He refused to pray in a Church, instead praying in the courtyard outside, fearing that Muslims would think it was acceptable to turn the Church into a Mosque as a result of his actions.

Even today, the most ancient and sacred Christian sites remain in the Muslim world. For centuries, the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest shrine in all Christendom, have been entrusted to a Muslim family for safekeeping.

Muslims ruled Spain for over 700 years and created a culture of brilliance where Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived in peace and rose together to new intellectual heights.

Terrorism

Our societies grow increasingly violent, and the shadow of terrorism affects many parts of the world. The goal of terrorism is always the same – kill some, to frighten many, and thereby achieve a stated political objective. Whether it is suicide bombers causing mayhem in subways, or carpet bombing jet fighters causing mayhem in cities – the killing of innocent civilians is inhumane, and is rejected by all people of conscience, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Islam considers human life as sacred. Saving the life of a single human being is equated with saving the entire human race. Conversely, murdering a single human being is such a severe sin, that it is equated murdering the entire human race. Allah (Almighty God) says: Whoever kills a soul, unless for a soul, or for corruption done in the land - it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely [Qur'an 5:32]. Given this clear verse, there should be no misunderstanding: Islam absolutely forbids the killing of civilians, wherever and whoever they may be, in absolute terms. Even if an Islamic state is engaged in a legitimate war, Islamic ethics forbid the killing of non-combatants. Muhammad specifically forbade his companions from killing women, children, the elderly, monks and those engaged in worship.

What about Jihad ? Terrorism and Jihad are two very different things. Jihad comes

from the root word ‘jahada’, which, in Arabic, means ‘to struggle’. It refers to struggling to submit one’s own will to the Will of Allah (Almighty God), or struggling against one’s base motives and desires. It also includes a struggle against injustice, or in self-defense.

So what about Muslims who carry out suicide bombings? First of all, Islam strictly forbids suicide for any reason whatsoever. Allah (Almighty God) says: Nor kill yourselves: for verily Allah has been to you Most Merciful [Qur’an 4:29]. In addition, Muhammad warned his companions that the one who intentionally takes his own life will dwell in hell. Thus, the suicide bomber combines two great evils which Islam forbids: the murder of innocents, and the taking of his own life.

If a Muslim commits a terrorist act, claiming it is Jihad or anything else, he is acting contrary to the clear laws Islam and the moral and legal precedent of Islamic societies for the last 1400 years. Terrorists are criminals, and deserve to be treated as such. Just because someone claims to stand upon a particular platform, it does not mean that that platform necessarily supports him.

Muslims around the world – including the world’s leading authorities on Islamic law and jurisprudence have loudly condemned the acts of extremists who have caused havoc amongst innocent people with their murderous acts. In America alone, hundreds of Islamic organizations have joined together to condemn terrorism – holding press conferences, issuing statements, running full page advertisements in national newspapers, running a Public Service Announcement on TV and holding outreach events.

Given the clear Islamic teachings against terrorism, and the revulsion and rejection millions of peace loving Muslims worldwide feel for such violence, it is unfortunate that many are content to hold Islam or Muslims at large accountable for the acts of a few misguided extremists. Many people are able to distinguish between a religion and its extremists. These people understand that Christianity is not to blame for the terrorism of Eric Rudolph or the abortion clinic bombers. They also understand that Judaism is not to blame for the terrorism of Dr. Baruch Goldstein or the settlers who kill unarmed Palestinian civilians.

Yet, these same people experience selective amnesia when it comes to Islam. The problem is greatly exacerbated by self-proclaimed “experts” on Islam who are given ample opportunity – on the air and in print - to spread their prejudiced interpretations of Islamic thought and life. These factors have given birth to oxymorons like “Islamic Terrorism”. Islam and terrorism are antithetical to one another – yet countless talking heads spout this hateful term with abandon. They would not think to speak of “Christian Terrorism” or “Jewish Terrorism”, lest it be considered hate speech, yet the vilification of an entire faith and its adherents rolls so easily off their tongues in the case of Islam.

As a result of such unfortunate double standards, Muslims in America and abroad continue to suffer from prejudice and violent hate crimes. This is a grave injustice that demands condemnation by all fair-minded people. Continued prejudice and violent hate crimes will only serve to fuel terrorist recruitment efforts.

Islam is a religion of peace, mercy, justice and forgiveness. Its clear teachings offer an antidote to the hatred and violence that threatens to engulf our shared world.

Women

One of the most widespread misconceptions about Islam is that it abuses and humiliates women. Nothing could be further from the truth - Islam accords women the high level of honor and dignity that they deserve.

Islam teaches that men and women are partners in life. Allah (Almighty God) says: And from amongst His Signs is this: That He created for you wives from amongst yourselves, so that you may find serenity and tranquility in them, and He has put between you love and compassion. Indeed, in this are signs for those who reflect [Qur'an 30:21].

Men and women are spiritually and morally equivalent since they originate from a common source. Allah (Almighty God) says: O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; - reverence Allah, through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you [Qur'an 4:1].

No one would dispute that males and females have a different physical and psychological make-up. Accordingly, Islam envisages different but complementary roles and responsibilities for each gender, suited to their unique abilities and strengths.

What about women's rights in Islam? 1400 years before the foundation of the modern feminist movement, Muslim women enjoyed the right to run a business, own property, earn an honest living, inherit wealth, enter into a legal contract, provide legal testimony and initiate a divorce. It was a Muslim woman, Khadija, the wife of Muhammad and a successful businesswoman in her own right, who comforted him after his initial encounter with the archangel Gabriel, which left him emotionally shaken. She was the first to believe in his message. Islamic history is jeweled with examples of brilliant female scholars, whose dazzling intellects enlightened the minds of both male and female students.

Muslim women are criticized by some for adopting the hijab – the Islamic dress code. This is an indication of the unfortunate state of the world in which we live. Since time immemorial, the hijab has been the mark of an Allah-conscious and modest woman. This quality is recognized in the habit of the Christian nun – which is almost identical to hijab, and in the idols and images of Mary, who is always shown wearing hijab - yet it becomes a reason for scorn when adopted by Muslim women. This is just another manifestation of anti-Islamic prejudice.

Many people believe that Muslim men force Muslim women to adopt hijab against their will – a baseless assumption that observant Muslim women find highly offensive. Muslim women cover first and foremost as an act of obedience to Allah (Almighty God). In addition to feeling closer to Allah (Almighty God), many women who adopt hijab experience a feeling of liberation. The hijab allows a woman to be judged by her intelligence and other noble qualities rather than by her physical characteristics. It protects her from lingering, unwelcome lustful stares, and allows her to reserve her beauty for her husband and close relatives alone. Contrary to popular belief, observant Muslim women continue to enjoy a position of honor, and a high level of self-esteem that comes from being cherished, respected, and protected.

Ethics and Morality

What does it mean to be good, moral and ethical? How should we live our lives?

Human beings lack the perfect intelligence and wisdom necessary to declare, with absolute certainty, what constitutes good and evil. People will differ, so that what is good in the eyes of one person is evil in the eyes of another. Hence, the evaluation of good and evil becomes completely subjective and changes over time according to one's whims and desires. As history has demonstrated time and again, man, when left to his own devices, will eventually fall victim to his base instincts, causing the destruction of himself and those around him.

Islam offers a way out of this cycle by teaching us that the road to happiness and success lies in becoming Allah-conscious and following the guidance of Allah (Almighty God) in all of our affairs. Allah (Almighty God) says: It is not righteousness that you turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the Prophets; and gives his wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observes proper worship and pays the poor due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the Allah fearing [Qur'an 2:177].

Some may object, claiming this is a limitation on human freedom. However, true freedom means liberating one's self from base desires and the pursuit of evil temptations, and entering wholeheartedly into the worship of God, who alone is worthy of all worship.

Everything that Allah (Almighty God) has commanded is good, and for the benefit of mankind. For example, Islamic ethics command us to be truthful, to help our neighbors, to be good to our parents, to be patient with our spouses, to defend the weak and to be charitable to the poor. Conversely, everything He has forbidden is evil, and harmful to mankind. For example, Islamic ethics forbid lying, theft, murder, adultery, slander, oppression and greed.

When one lives according to Islamic principles, and keeps in mind one's accountability in the life hereafter, one can achieve a balanced and moral life, in accordance with the Will of Allah (Almighty God).

History and Civilization

The glorious history of Islamic civilization is an instructive example of the fruits of implementing Islam in society and life.

Muslims are justifiably proud of their history, which saw them excel in diverse fields of intellectual endeavor, among them: the establishment of law and justice, advancement of science and technology, enrichment of the humanities, and a flourishing of the arts. Allah (Almighty God) says: Have they not traveled in the land and seen the nature of the consequence for those who were before them? They were stronger than them in power [Qur'an 30:9].

Inspired by statements in the Qur'an encouraging them to reflect upon the majesty of God's creation, Muslims became the world’s leading thinkers. Muslims built the world’s first universities – Al-Zaytunah in Tunis, and Al-Azhar in Cairo, both of which are over 1000 years old. Muslim astronomers devised precise calendars, built astronomical tables, compiled almanacs and built the world’s first observatories. The great Muslim mathematician Al-Khawarizmi (from whose name we derive the word ‘Algorithm’) invented algebra (Al Jabr in Arabic).

Muslims built the world’s first public hospital in Baghdad in 706CE. Texts on medicine produced by the Islamic world were studied in Europe for centuries.

The great historian Ibn Khaldun was the first to examine history and culture within the paradigm of scientific enquiry, laying the foundation for the study of sociology and political economics. Muslims also made great advances in geography, chemistry, and other fields.

The efforts of Muslim scholars and intellectuals contributed significantly to the Renaissance, which helped Europe overcome its Dark Ages. It is of great significance that Muslims advanced culturally and scientifically when they followed Islamic teachings. Islam has never taught a conflict between religion and science, since true religion and true science are always in agreement.

How is it that a culture of illiterate, desert dwelling shepherds achieved ascendancy over the world, laying the foundation of an empire that lasted over 1000 years? The implementation of the Qur'an and the example of Muhammad reformed their society into one focused on Allah-consciousness, truth, justice, compassion and knowledge. The revival of Islamic civilization is linked to a return to the pure teachings of Islam and an appreciation of its rich cultural and intellectual tradition.